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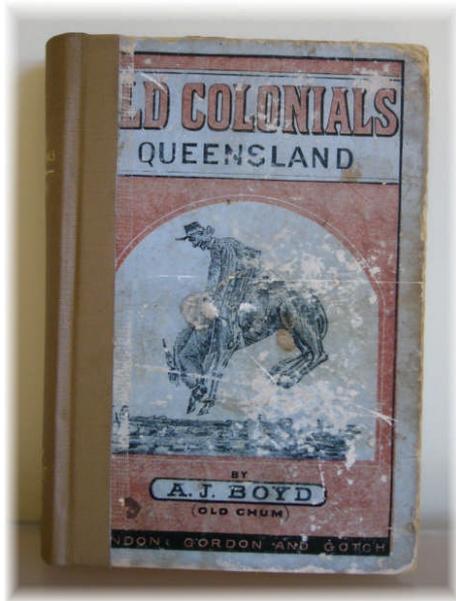
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Old Colonials

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OLD COLONIALS

BY

A. J. BOYD.

(Old Chum)

ILLUSTRATED

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

GORDON AND GOTCH

ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS

AND AT MELBOURNE, SYDNEY AND BRISBANE

—
1891

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THE DROVER.

—o—

I SPENT a few days lately on a station in Northern Queensland. It happened to be just at the time that a drover had come to fetch a large mob of fat cattle from various stations. There were several drovers about the neighbourhood at the time, as the demand for cattle at the Palmer diggings made it profitable for men to buy cattle on the stations and drive them to the diggings, where a large price was obtainable.

My drover looked such a jolly, happy, well-to-do sort of man, with fair round stomach, &c., that I determined to glean some information from him on the subject of his profession. It happened one evening that we were sitting together smoking, and the subject of cattle was naturally brought up.

“ Well, I’m not exactly a drover ; that is to say, I have done other things in my life. I am really what men call a pioneer. I was one of the first to bring cattle up to this district. I was here when the white man had only shown his nose as an explorer. I could tell you yarns that would make your hair stand on an end ; and they should be true ones. As to droving, I have overlanded sheep and cattle. Which do I prefer ? Cattle, ten thousand times. Sheep are the most obstinate brutes that ever worried a sinner. I was driving a large mob of sheep once from—well say, A. to Z. It was frightful weather, pouring heavens hard, and the state of the ground under foot was fearful. There was a very large bog to get across, and we made a bridge over it,

THE COCKATOO FARMER.



WHY Cockatoo? What, in the name of all that's lovely, has a cockatoo got in common with a farmer? They both appreciate good maize, doubtless, but there, I apprehend, the similitude ends.

Who first discovered the title of "cockatoo farmer?" Who was the first cockatoo farmer?

There are certainly two ways in which the name might have arisen. It might have originated with ticket-of-leave men from Cockatoo Island; or it may possibly have been a term of reproach applied to the industrious farmer, who settled or perched on the resumed portions of a squatter's run, so much to the latter's rage and disgust that he contemptuously likened the farmer to the white-coated, yellow-crested, screamer that settles or perches on the trees at the edge of his namesake's clearing.

Be that as it may, we will visit a cockatoo farmer, and at least we shall find out what his occupation may be.

Let him speak for himself.

"Ay! hard at it, as you say. There ain't much rest for the likes o' me. 'Tain't like them swell coves as is able to put on lots o' hands, as eats 'em out of house an' home, as farming don't pay nohow with them chaps.

"Does it pay me? I don't see as it actilly pays nobody.

THE COACHDRIVER.



NEXT to the American coachdriver I think the Australian professional may take precedence of all the world in skill and daring. The roads in the newest settlements of Queensland are among the very worst to be found in Australia, and the man who undertakes to conduct a coach drawn by four half-broken-in young horses safely for a couple of hundred miles over these roads may claim to be a scientific man.

It does not require much skill or coolness to hold passively a pair of reins attached to the leathery jaws of a sluggish beast peaceably ambling over a road level as a bowling-green; but to sit behind four wild brutes, who are with difficulty restrained at the start by a groom at the head of each, and to keep them firmly under control the instant they are liberated, when they at once attempt to bolt, is a matter requiring coolness, presence of mind, and great judgment. This is more particularly the case when a deep gully, crossed by a rickety corduroy bridge, or perhaps a deeper gully with no bridge, presents itself within twenty yards of the starting point. I have had many opportunities of observing the risks and dangers which attend the coachdriver's career, and on one occasion I witnessed an accident which is not uncommon during the season when the creeks and rivers are running "a banker."

The coach from B—— to P——, after successfully cross-

THE PROSPECTOR.

—o—

As the jackal to the lion or the pilot fish to the shark, so is the prospector to the digger.

The comparison may appear rather strange, but it nevertheless expresses very faithfully the relation between the two classes. The prospector is the digger's provider, and a bold and adventurous character he is. He is a true Bohemian—never settling down long in one place, but always restlessly on the move—seeking, and at rare intervals finding. He means to become suddenly wealthy without long, settled, and laborious toil. The difficulties and dangers undergone by these wanderers beyond the confines of civilization are only equalled by those encountered by the explorers and pioneers, of whom I have already given some account. Every gold-field in the colonies has contributed to swell the ranks of the skirmishers in advance of the great army of diggers. I have met with them often in my journeys, and many a night's camp has been enlivened by their yarns. The last time I came in contact with a prospector was at Craigie, in Northern Queensland. His tent was pitched away amongst the gorges some twelve miles from the station where I met him, and there he lived all alone, pursuing his avocation, heedless of the numerous blacks who wandered about their fastnesses, and who doubtless kept a watchful eye over him, in the hope of surprising and killing him. Miller (this was the prospector's

THE GOLD ESCORT.

—o—

THERE is something in the word "Gold Escort" which conveys a world of meaning to my mind. Suggestive as it is of troopers, horses, arms, gold bags, van and rear-guards—of a semi-military progress through the wild Australian bush—of night camps and bushrangers—it carries with it an idea of a strange kind of existence, such as can only be realized by a participation in the toils and pleasures of a trip from the diggings to the port with the Escort.

The duty of conveying the gold from a New South Wales diggings to the seaboard has always been fraught with considerable danger to the officers and troopers composing the guard, although at the present day the danger cannot be compared with what it was many years ago, when the diggings, then in the first blush of their discovery, attracted hordes of ruffians of every type of rascality, who depended not on their own industry for "making a pile," but on the chances afforded them for rapine, robbery, and even murder, by the necessarily weak police protection, and the facilities which existed for making away with such unrecognizable plunder as alluvial gold. The stories told of the sticking-up of escorts by Australian bushrangers of the Gardiner, Morgan, and Wild Scotchman type have been so often told, that I need not repeat them here. It would be mere plagiarism. On commencing these papers, I set before myself to

THE BUSH BUTCHER.

—o—

THERE be town butchers, and there be bush butchers; butchers professional, who, with marvellous precision, will slice off a steak which shall weigh a pound within a fraction, without the aid of scales; butchers non-professional, who are butchers by force of circumstances; and amateur butchers, who cannot for the life of them tell whether a sirloin be a portion of the neck or the hock.

My butcher is a conglomeration of these three. He is not solely professional, because he has but lately adopted the trade. He is not non-professional, because he gains his living by butchering; and he is not an amateur, because he dislikes the business, and only uses it as a means to an end.

The bush butcher generally starts his business as soon as there is sufficient population in an outside district to warrant his killing from three to four beasts weekly. He then sets up a spring cart and horse to run his beef round to his customers, and erects a smoking house, and a boiling down battery. He is now in full swing, and rapidly becomes one of the most important men in his district.

Of course he is a horsey man, and, consequently, is the first to initiate race meetings, at which he is invariably chairman. When races are to come off, he is always chosen, either as a referee, umpire, starter, or judge. He always seems to have command of money.

THE SUGAR-BOILER.



A LONG-SUFFERING, patient, much-enduring individual is the sugar-boiler. On him depends the fate of a crop which has taxed the time, the knowledge, and the labour of the planter. Woe be to the sugar-boiler if the coolers be not hard, if the grain of the sugar be not large, if there be an undue proportion of mollasses, if the sugar be too black, or too grey, and a great many other ifs. All the accidents, often unavoidable, are set down to the incapacity, imbecility, or obstinacy, of the sugar-boiler. How many a one of these has boiled his way from south to north of the colony, abused here, insulted there, turned out of this boiling-house, and taken on in that, only to be removed again to make room for a new man, whose ultimate fate will be the same as that of his predecessor. And what labours these men perform during the height of the sugar season is scarcely known to those who see the results on their tables at meal-times. All day long they watch the bubbling pans, watch the men who have charge of them, watch the temperature of the fresh juice as it fills the clarifiers, watch the men who feed the mill to see that no sour canes are passed through. Lynx-eyed, they pass the season in one perpetual watch, for on that rigid sentinel work depends their fame, and consequently their daily bread. Night brings no cessation of labour to the weary sugar-boiler. The mill hands retire to

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All of this and more may be available in a seemingly mundane book such as a directory. Learn much of the background of life at the time, even if your ancestor is not listed there.